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SUBJECT: Letter to President Obama from Chairman of the Caucasus Muslim Board

1. (U) Below is the text of a letter from Sheykh-ul-Islam Haji Allahshukur Pashazade, Chairman of the Caucasus Muslim Board, which the Embassy has been asked to forward to President Barack Obama:

BEGIN TEXT:

No. 022

January 23, 2009

To the President of the United States of America
[H. E. Barack Hussein Obama](#)

With the name of God, the Only One,

I would like to congratulate you on the occasion of assuming the duties of the U.S. President and I ask God for every success for you. It is true that the world community including the Muslim community has faith in you and your activities. The faith that is linked to the hope that we can -- with the help of God -- restore and enhance peace and justice, stability and mutual understanding. It is clear that people's expectations are high from a great country such as the U.S. The results of the global processes are to a great extent dependent on the U.S. and its leadership position and approaches. Everyone is expecting wise decisions and just actions from the U.S. leader.

Ideas you have expressed addressing the Muslim world during your inauguration gave impetus to our hopes. As a matter of fact, the Muslim world and the U.S. share common interests and that makes it so necessary to build new relations based on mutual understanding and trust. As an Azerbaijani citizen I foster the hope of your just position in the resolution of the most painful problem for my land of origin.

I am confident that your presidency will enter in the U.S. history as a new quality stage that will help to increase the esteem and glory of the U.S. as well as serve to restore justice in the world.

May God help you,

With respect

/s/

Sheykh-ul-Islam Haji Allahshukur Pashazade
Chairman of the Caucasus Muslim Board

END TEXT.

COMMENT: Caucasus Muslim Board

2. (SBU) Since 1980, Sheikh Allahshukur Pashazade has headed the Caucasus Muslim Board (CMB), which is located in Baku, Azerbaijan, the population of which is approximately 93 percent Muslim (although many residents are non-practicing). The CMB was created during the Soviet period, and, in the present day, on behalf of the entire south Caucasus region, it organizes pilgrimages to Mecca, appoints clerics to head mosques, and monitors sermons. Along with the Azerbaijani State Committee for Work with Religious Structures (SCWRS), which oversees all religious activity in Azerbaijan, including non-Muslim faiths, the CMB is a cooperative entity in the

overall Azerbaijani government goal of maintaining a strict secular system. As such, Sheikh Pashazade is a very influential figure in both Azerbaijan and the south Caucasus region, connected in government, religious, and business circles. While the Sheikh represents the Islamic interests of the south Caucasus, he is a key element of the government effort to maintain a strict separation of church and state. Though there are several documented cases of alleged religious harassment, Azerbaijan is largely a religiously tolerant country which has cooperated with the U.S. in battling terrorism.

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